



NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2011

Remember to save this weekend...

May 20-22, 2011

Friendship Yoga Annual Spring Retreat at Prairiewoods
with Guest Teacher: Mary Obendorfer

"Even as the body ages and is able to do less, there are subtleties that reveal themselves, which would be invisible to younger or more athletic bodies."

— BKS Iyengar, *Light on Life*



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Bring a friend to a free class in January.
Visit www.friendshipyoga.com for a
schedule of free classes.

From the Director... Nancy Footner, Director, Friendship Yoga Certified Iyengar Yoga Instructor

Why are Iyengar Yoga teachers so demanding? So darn persnickety?

Why does it matter if the outer heel of the left foot is pressed firmly into the floor as we extend to the right side in *utthita trikonasana* (extended triangle pose)? Informing my students of the reasoning behind the exactness of the parts of each pose, and insisting on this exactness is an important part of my job. It is the responsibility of every well-trained teacher with a conscience; who feels love and compassion for her students.

As an Iyengar yoga teacher, when I observe a student with his/her front knee bent in *utthita trikonasana*, I see a problem and I look quickly to the student's back foot. More often than not I see that the outer edge is lifted away from the floor and the arch has collapsed. I know that when the back leg isn't doing its fair share of the work, a misalignment will follow

a path from the ankles to the knees, up into the hips, spine, and shoulders and throughout the nervous system.

Sometimes, repeating the instruction "Press the back outer heel and pull up through the front knee" elicits the needed correction. Sometimes a prop will bring necessary support. Making a physical adjustment can alert the student to what's gone wrong. I might put my foot next to his/her foot and say "press into my foot" to bring the student's awareness back to the base of the pose. Sometimes asking students to "come and watch" brings understanding as I demonstrate or use another student to show what the consequences are of correct and incorrect actions.

So why are Iyengar Yoga teachers so darn persnickety? In part - to protect their

students from injury; in part - to instill into their consciousness the reasoning inherent to the structure of the asana.

Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras enumerates the obstacles (*klesas*) to spiritual enlightenment. *Avidya*, "not knowing" or ignorance, is first and foremost. I came to Iyengar yoga in an extremely weak, stiff and vulnerable state. I had no idea that the back pain I was experiencing was directly related to my weak legs, stiff hips, tight shoulders and weak arms, but I did know that I was depressed and dispirited from being locked into chronic pain. When I learned that this was something I had the power to control through the discipline of yoga, it was as if someone had given me a key to my prison cell. I am eternally grateful to B.K.S. Iyengar and all of my teachers for giving me that key. It is what I strive to give to my students.

Namaste,
Nancy Footner,
Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher

Film Screening: *Ultimate Freedom*

The *Ultimate Freedom* a filmed demonstration by B.K.S. Iyengar will be Sunday, March 27, 3-4pm Meeting Rm A Iowa City Public Library

Come and bring family and friends to view this amazing lecture and demonstration filmed in Ann Arbor Michigan in 1971.

Note: On December 14, 2010 B.K.S. Iyengar turned 92 years young.

Who Trained Your Teacher?

John Schumacher, Senior Certified Iyengar Teacher, Director Unity Woods. Edited and Reprinted with permission.

If you are a yoga student, you trust your body, mind, and spirit to a teacher, even if only for an hour or two. And if yoga has the power to improve your health, calm your mind, and put you in touch with your innermost nature [It does.], then it has the power to do harm on all those levels as well. Do you really want to put yourself in the hands of someone who is poorly trained and incompetent and can do you harm?

There are an astronomical number of teacher training programs in the US. I have no idea how many. I don't know if anyone does. I just know there are lots. However, this is not going to be an in depth examination of teacher training in the US. I haven't the space, time, or knowledge to do that. (It would, however, make a great article for Yoga Journal or Time Magazine or somebody, since yoga is a multi-billion dollar business in this country.)

Nor is it my intention to write a sensational expose of "How Greedy, Unscrupulous Yoga Charlatans are Taking Your Money and Endangering Your Life!" I truly believe that, while there are probably a few bad apples in the yoga teacher training business (Where there's money, there are bad apples. [See Wall St., Big Oil, etc.]), nearly everyone running a teacher training program is well intentioned.

So, given the abundance of teacher training programs, what kind of training has your yoga teacher had?

I suspect that most folks don't really know. My purpose in raising the question is to prompt you to think about the person(s) to whom you're trusting some of the most important things in the world: your own health and well-being. Let's take a brief look then at some aspects of yoga teacher training here in the US.

First: There are no national standards nor, as far as I know, are there regional or local standards, either. Anyone who wants to can hang out their yoga teacher shingle. Whether such standards should

exist is an interesting and, within the yoga community, hotly debated subject. In any case, although I don't think this happens much, you could read an article in a magazine about yoga, decide you want to be a yoga teacher, and start up some classes. Actually, you don't even need to read an article.

But I think most folks are a little more sensible and scrupulous than that. They take classes for awhile (How long varies. We do get calls from people asking about teacher training WHO HAVE NEVER HAD A CLASS OR DONE ANY YOGA AT ALL!), and after a while, for whatever reason, decide that they would like to teach.

Then what?

Well, if you want to learn how to do something, you go to school, right? Many prospective teachers look around a bit to find out what kind of training is available and then pick the one that suits them. Criteria for choosing can vary from geographical convenience, to amount of time required, cost, style of yoga, the qualifications of the teacher(s), and more.

Here are a few things I think are worth considering in judging (yes, judging) the quality of a teacher training program:

What qualifications does someone have to have to get into the program? If the only requirement is having enough money to cover the tuition, then be suspicious of such a program and the products thereof. For many teacher trainings, NO PREVIOUS YOGA EXPERIENCE IS REQUIRED! This is unimaginable to me. Someone could walk in off the street without having taken a single class, sign up for teacher training, and by the end of the program, be a certified teacher. This is preposterous because, believe it or not, good teaching isn't based primarily on knowledge. Knowing how and what to teach well comes from the experience gained in the teacher's own practice.

This is very different from memorizing a few details about a pose and then reciting

them to the student. If a teacher training program is a one month course and complete novices can join, there is not enough time to acquire the knowledge and experience necessary to teach safely and effectively. It's just not possible. Substantial time (read years) spent practicing is necessary before embarking on teacher training and should be a prerequisite of any meaningful teacher training program.

Duration of the teacher training program is another consideration. Some are as little as a weekend. Many are a month. I wouldn't want to trust my well-being to someone with only a month's training, no matter how intensive. It not only takes time to acquire the knowledge needed to teach, it takes time to absorb that knowledge, to practice it, understand it, to experience the variations and subtleties. Six months would be a bare minimum in my estimation, and even that isn't really enough.

Who is teaching the teacher training program? If the teacher(s) running the program are not knowledgeable and deeply experienced themselves, then there is no chance that they are going to produce knowledgeable and skillful teachers. They can't give to the trainees what they themselves haven't got.

How can you tell what your teacher(s)' training and qualifications are? Ask! You ask questions when you shop for anything else, don't you? If the teacher evades or resents your questions, find another teacher. S/he should be happy and proud to give you his/her qualifications. To go a step further, don't be satisfied with just seeing some letters after a teacher's name. For instance, lots of teachers have RYT200 or RYT500 after their name. What's that mean? RYT is a designation from an organization called the Yoga Alliance that means Registered Yoga Teacher. It does NOT mean they are certified. Despite suppositions to the

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Priceless

Ageless Yoga ...

-JUDY HENDERSHOT-

I am a member of the “ageless” yoga class. When people ask me about the term **ageless**, I frequently think **old**. Then I think of the people in the class, and I think **priceless**. The description of our class says that it is “for anyone requiring a less strenuous class.” That can include younger people with physical problems or those of us “of an age” who have to fight stiffness and decreased mobility.

I am tired of the euphemisms used to describe older people. I read an article once which suggested that we be called **classic**. I personally would go for **revered**, but I know a number of people who would refuse to entitle me **revered**. Whatever they call us as we get older (or **infirm**), we better pay attention to what our bodies are telling us or we will need a hoist to get out of a chair. I admire everyone in my class, most of whom are younger than I (but not all), but many of whom have pronounced physical problems. I am in awe that we sit on the floor and

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contrary, Yoga Alliance is not a certifying body. It registers teachers as having completed 200 or 500 hours of some kind of study. That training can vary widely and is not really monitored in any thorough or systematic way.

Large organizations and longstanding tradition tend to have more extensive and organized training and/or certification processes. Anusara, White Lotus, and YogaWorks, for example, have relatively comprehensive training programs. But size and longevity are no guarantee. The Sivananda teacher training program, one of the oldest around, is a one month course.

Here at Unity Woods, most of our teachers are certified through the Iyengar Yoga National Association of the United States (IYNAUS). If you look at the teacher page in the newsletter and/or on the website, you will see the term “certified Iyengar yoga teacher” in their bios. Here’s what that means:

There are five degrees of teacher certification in this system with the most basic being the Introductory level. Intermediate Junior, Intermediate Senior, Advanced Junior, and Advanced Senior

are the other levels containing subsets within each degree (e.g., Intermediate Junior I, II, or III).

To be certified at the Introductory level (the most basic of five progressive degrees), an applicant must have had a minimum of three years of study with certified Iyengar yoga teachers while maintaining a continuous regular practice during that time. After three years or more of study, s/he must complete a two or three year teacher training program, 150 hours of apprenticeship, or a combination of the two; be recommended by two certified teachers; and pass an assessment by three Intermediate or above certified teachers. The assessment includes: a written exam covering aspects of anatomy, philosophy, and teaching; a 1.5-2 hour demonstrated practice of basic yoga asanas (postures) and pranayamas (breathing techniques); and teaching a forty minute class. The candidate is graded and passes or fails. If s/he passes, s/he then studies with a mentor for at least another year and takes a second assessment similar to the first in format with more difficult asanas and a more challenging written exam. After passing the second assessment s/he is awarded an Introductory teaching

certificate. S/he must teach only Iyengar yoga without mixing in other styles, must observe the IYNAUS Ethical Guidelines, and must continue to study with a more senior teacher. Only then can s/he legitimately claim to be a certified Iyengar yoga teacher.

If you do the math, you will see that it takes a bare minimum of five years of study to become a certified Iyengar yoga teacher. Most people take longer. As far as I know, this is the most rigorous training and certification process in the US.

All that being said, credentials, no matter how impressive, do not guarantee the quality of a teacher. They do, however, give you an idea of the depth of training a teacher has had and an indication of the likely knowledge and competence the teacher brings to her/his teaching. I urge every prospective yoga student and even current students to investigate a bit. Find out what your teacher’s training is, what her/his qualifications are, and what those letters after their name or the diplomas on the wall really mean. It makes good sense and is worth the time and effort. And you will be happier and healthier in the long run.

Ten Years...

- LIZ SMITH -

This fall marks my ten year anniversary of taking classes at Friendship Yoga! I know this because the year that I started was the year that my daughter became pregnant, and that granddaughter is now nine years old.

When Nancy first told me she was starting a yoga studio, I told her that I had tried yoga in the past, but found it “boring” - it was too slow, my mind would wander, I would want to “get going.” Her response was “you won’t find my classes boring.” Boy, was that true! Challenging, scary sometimes, daunting – all those - Boring? Never.

But obviously there is more, or I wouldn’t still be here ten years later. And in all those years, I might have missed a few classes, but have never missed enrolling for a session. So what keeps me coming, even though many days it is an effort to get here and would be so much easier to stay home and relax, or even go for a walk? Well, all I can think is that the benefits seem so great, both immediate and long-term.

On the immediate level, I always feel better after class than I did on the way in, even if (or maybe especially if) the class was “a real stretch” for my abilities. I never would have imagined that I would do a headstand or hang upside down from ropes. I didn’t even do those things when I was a kid. What a great sense of accomplishment. The enduring benefits are the ability to continue to do all the other activities I enjoy, enriching my life physically, mentally, spiritually. It is still exciting to feel the strength and focus that I continue to gain through this practice.

Speaking of practice, I must add a word about home practice. This is one of the surprises for me, that I would be inspired to continue my practice in between FY classes. Over the years, I have increased my home practice, with Nancy’s voice in my head coaching me on. Yoga has truly become part of my life.

I wonder if I will still be taking yoga at Friendship in another ten years. I certainly hope so. I have not been bored.

Fourteen Years...

- ELLEN BUCHANAN -

I have been a Friendship Yoga student for almost 14 years. (During the winter months I study with Suzie Muchnik, a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher in Naples, Florida.) My initial impetus to take a yoga class came after overcoming breast cancer.

Over the years I have worked hard to become progressively more flexible and strong. I feel the subtle and not so subtle changes in myself and see the obvious changes in fellow students as we stand taller with shoulders back and chests lifted.

My yoga path has had its ups and downs. I recently had two total knee replacements. Anticipating the surgery, I did not know if I could expect to return to the class afterwards, but Nancy was optimistic and encouraged me to plan on returning to class as soon as I felt ready. My surgery was in January and in June I resumed classes at Friendship Yoga.

With my new knees, my practice is now stronger in many ways, and I have learned how to use the bolsters, blankets, chairs, and ropes to accommodate my knees if necessary. My yoga practice has strengthened my resolve.

As a determined 72 year old woman embarking on a new year, my mantra is “Maintenance is progress.” And so I continue.



Fifteen years...

- CAROL HOWARD -

Sometimes one has to pause and look back, and recently I did just that. It occurred to me that I was approaching my 15th anniversary of yoga classes at Friendship Yoga. Wow! Not much else has “continued” for the past 15 years of my life. In fact, there has been a lot of change... family lost, family gained; worked every day, retired; saw friends move away, made new friends, etc. Yoga classes and my street address seem to stand out as two sustaining threads in my life. The yoga thread continues to evolve since every class has a fresh lesson plan with new ways to help me get a little closer to a classic pose. I am looking forward to the next 15 plus years!

EDITOR’S NOTE: TO MARK HER 15TH “YOGA ANNIVERSARY”, CAROL HAS MADE A GENEROUS DONATION TO THE MAITRI YOGA EDUCATION FUND. HER GENEROSITY WILL HELP ANOTHER STUDENT SUSTAIN THEIR PRACTICE IN THESE TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES. SEE PAGE 6 FOR MORE INFORMATION

EVERY MILLIMETER OF MOVEMENT COUNTS

WHEN THE KINESTHETIC LINES OF GRACE ARE EXPRESSED

JANE F. BOURGEOIS, D.C.
SYNCHRONICITY CHIROPRACTIC
AND HEALING ARTS

This is one of the many “body mechanic” thoughts I have in my mind coming in and out of a yoga asana—similar to observing and guiding a patient with their body’s joint and muscle language in my profession as a chiropractor. How do I separate the two? I don’t, which is why I feel such a deep appreciation for the teachings I have embraced over the years at Friendship Yoga and at Iyengar yoga intensives and retreats.

From my undergraduate years of painstakingly making it through many math and science classes at Colorado Mountain College, I can still remember the advice that stuck with me from a well-respected professor: “To really understand something you feel passionate about . . . teach it to learn it.” I knew those particular subjects were not on my horizon for teaching, but their obligatory step-by-step methodology gave me a foundation which I continue to build upon personally and professionally.

It is my job to educate, bridge, and

expand the knowledge of my patients as I assist each individual in making more agreeable and tangible space in their body for improved neurological and biomechanical function. I frequently hear and see the stories that go on in a body that has survived injuries, traumas and life’s challenges.

When my patients ask me about yoga I generally begin my response with, “In my experience, the precision of instruction

“It’s about showing up and finding the honesty of change within your own work.”

in the Iyengar Yoga method runs parallel to mathematics. The attention to detail and mindful discipline begins in class one. Iyengar Yoga is not about performance or competition. It’s about showing up and finding the honesty of change within your own work.”

Or, I may be the one to bring up the

subject to a patient. “Let’s talk about yoga as the next step of finding more body symmetry, strength and improved posture.”

Upon arriving in Iowa City fifteen years ago, I knew I wanted to expand on the ‘engineering’ concepts I had studied in chiropractic school. I chose dance and yoga, and the many hours I have committed to the dance floor and yoga mat have helped to refine my chiropractic work. The body’s healing process, whether in response to an acute injury or chronic issue follows a journey. Practicing yoga is a journey.

I can recall years ago my reply to the concern of a yoga teacher who observed my facial expression abruptly change to a grimace. My own internal injury stories were finding new space to own versus paying rent in the congested joint storage room with soft tissue clutter. My reply to her with a half smile was, “Oh, just ligament adhesions talking.” The next day we had an open forum discussion prior to class, and an extremely limber person new to yoga said “yoga felt easy.” Laurie Blakeney’s, (our teacher) response resonated with my personal experience and professional knowledge: “I would rather it is difficult and safe vs. dangerously easy.”

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and can actually come to standing without assistance. It often takes us longer, but we can do it.

Sometimes when I am struggling in class, I decide to tell Nancy that this is TOO MUCH for one of my advanced years. Then I remember her statement that Iyengar yoga is not a competitive sport and that I should do the best I can. Mr. Iyengar says that you are as

young as your spine is flexible. So what if I look like a sack of potatoes in my tights? Nobody in Ageless cares. They are all intent on doing the asanas to the best of their abilities.

I am glad I don’t have to compete for the cutest tights or the best downward facing dog pose. I am glad that at this age I can get out of chairs without help, walk a couple of miles, and study yoga with a master teacher in a class of priceless students.

Asana is an opportunity to look at obstacles in practice and life and discover how we can cope with them.

— ***BKS Iyengar, Light on Life***



Student reads Friendship Yoga News while practicing supta pandangustasana.

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It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult. —Seneca

Or is that up?

TERESA BIANCHERI

For years I thought that Sirsasana was too difficult and I would always need to do this asana against a wall. I just recently, however, began to balance in Sirsasana for whole moments at a time all on my own; I'm not up there for very long, but it marks a huge step for me.

While I was able to get up into a headstand as a nine-year-old on the gymnastics team, I mostly lost the ability after I lost interest in gymnastics. Later, when I began practicing yoga as an adult, I focused on the asanas that I could do well because of a mostly unearned flexibility. I gave little time to the poses that I found difficult.

I typically avoided most inversions because I thought I was too big for them and because being upside down didn't quiet my mind—it stirred things up. Thoughts raced and all sorts of glum scenarios of what might happen while I was upside down played in my mind. It also didn't help that after years of stooping over to write and edit my neck and shoulders were out of whack. Even when I was attending three or four yoga classes a week back in Chicago and keeping the back pain at bay, I mostly managed to avoid Sirsasana, even if my instructor there kept enumerating its many benefits.

In one of the first classes I took at Friendship Yoga, Nancy asked us to do rope Sirsasana. A newcomer

to Iyengar yoga, I just stared in awe while she demonstrated the pose. I immediately rejected the idea that my body could actually hang from ropes. I was certain I would fall. With specific instructions from Nancy, however, I didn't have to focus on the end result and I didn't have time to fret about what I could or couldn't do. Slowly, I followed each direction on how to assemble the sling. There is something soothing in tying the knots and folding the blanket over the ropes. A kind student next to me offered to hand me the board that would ostensibly hold me in place.

Before I knew it, I was in the pose. I still had the mental noise but I also had these small adjustments I had to make too so I could give more attention to doing them than to the noise.

At home now, I often use a headstand stand, which allows me to practice Sirsasana in a way that approximates using the ropes and gives my neck and shoulders a rest when they need it. I still have that mental static as I go upside down, but it's not quite as loud and the catastrophic images of me landing in a heap have mostly subsided. I also have too much to remember while I'm in the pose to pay attention to those worries. I need to turn my legs in, and flex my ankles and feet, and move my shoulders down . . . or is that up?

I first came in contact with Friendship Yoga through a little known organization called Yoga Bear. Yoga Bear is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting opportunities for wellness and healing to the cancer community through the practice of yoga.

But, although I am a cancer survivor, the crisis that propelled me to Friendship Yoga was the loss of a good job. All those feelings of uncertainty, doom, of walking on eggs, were again heightened as vividly and intensely by the loss of my job as had been 8 years earlier by my bout with cancer. Yoga Bear put me in contact with Nancy.

And the healing began again.

Nancy is a strong teacher. She is meticulous, consistent and immensely generous. In the practice of Yoga I am at the point where my body guides me. I say no, and my body says, "Sure you can go a little further," and like bamboo that bends with the winds and does not break I find my strength through the practice of Yoga. The psychological benefits of the asanas are as colossal as the physical advantages. *Tadasana* has taught me to stand upright in different circumstances. *Utthita Trikonasana* to seek perfection in the simplest things. *Pandangustasana* to work really, really hard. *Ardha Chandrasana* has taught me the pure delight of perfect balance and *Sirsasana* to nullify the superfluous.

My life is humming nicely again, unhurried, with the rhythm of the familiar. The discipline and focus of Yoga and particularly the Iyengar method taught at Friendship Yoga helps me breathe, move and live with increased pliability and satisfaction.

- Mercedes Costoyas-Perret -



Please make your check payable to the Maitri Yoga Education Fund and send to 1231 Gilbert Court, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. Your donation is not tax-deductible. The benefit to you is the knowledge that you have helped someone less fortunate share the benefits that yoga offers us all.

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